



Utilising Employees Performance Management System (EPMS) towards Enhancing Academic Staff Performance in Higher Education Institutions

Farhan Al Anzi¹ and Shaik Abdul Malik Mohamed Ismail²

Universiti Sains Malaysia

Penang, Malaysia

Email : ¹ frf9293@hotmail.com, ² samohame@gmail.com

Abstract

Extrapolating from a widprior scholarly work, the present paper attempts to shed light on the gaps in the literature in terms academic staff performance in the higher education sector. It appears that, at the conceptual level; there is no clear framework concerning the relationships that could ideally guide the interactions between elements of employee performance management system (EPMS) and the performance of academic staff members. Additionally, there is also an obvious ambiguity about the role of change agents in enhancing the relationship between EPMS and staff performance. Subsequently, this paper intends to underline the notion of conceptualising the nexus between the dimensions of EPMS and academic personnel performance; and at the same time, the examination of change agents' contribution in this regard. The paper concludes its position by discussing the idea of EPMS, change agents and how HRM can play their respective role followed by recommendations for further research on each entity introspectively for the responsive development of higher institutions in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: employees' performance management system (EPMS); higher education, academic staff performance

Introduction

It is well documented that employee performance management system (EPMS) has been regarded as one of the instrument that is capable of steering performance among the employees (Clarke & Newman, 1997; Ferlie, Musselin & Andresani, 2008; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Townley, 1993; Wilson, 2002) which would in turn guarantee long term quality of education and institutional effectiveness and efficacy (Clarke & Newman, 1997; Ferlie, Musselin & Andresani, 2008; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; Townley, 1993; Wilson, 2002).

Saudi Arabia as an emerging economy, is relatively new in the perspective of the development of its` higher education system. Particularly when compared to other Asia, European and North American economies, there is a dearth of research and responsive developmental focus thus, highlighting the need to look at academic staff performance. For instance, back in 1949, only seven universities offered higher education opportunities in Saudi Arabia. Over the years, the number has steadily increased reaching

to 571 at present. In specific, there are 25 public funded universities and 32 private universities, which incorporate 323 and 89 colleges under their banner respectively (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012).

Currently, the number of higher education personnel stands at 45,593 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2012). Though, there is a noticeable growth in terms of the numbers and respectively, in the governmental programmes and plans related to higher education (Al-Khalifa 2010). However, on a simultaneous note, the relevant ministries are also excited about the initiatives calling for the integration of state of the art technologies to enhance staff efficiency and across Saudian Universities² especially in the area of sharing knowledge among the faculty members (Abokhodiar, 2013).

Looking introspectively on previous researches, studies have realised that the call for change to meet the demands of technology in particular have tremendously pressured most higher education institutions to seek for new ways to manage their employees and subsequently, strive to fit into the new environment. One important way to achieve this goal is through the utilisation of the EPMS (Goll, Johnson, & Rasheed, 2007). Notably, scholarly work can be tracked pointing out towards the importance of EPMS (Brennan & Shah 2000; Middlehurst 2004; Ferlie et al. 2008; Decramer, Smolders, Vanderstraeten and Christiaens 2012). However; in practice and in the context of Saudi Arabia, there is a clear evidence of EPMS absence especially when it comes to publications and information in the Saudi Higher Education radar. Accordingly, Asif and Searcy (2014) have asserted that the higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia are increasingly failing in terms of boosting performance of their academic personnel. It is also apparent that these institutions lack appropriate systems to manage such deteriorating performance.

1 Statistics Centre of Ministry of Higher Education in SA

2 Goals and objectives for ministry of higher education updated August 2010:
<http://www.mohe.gov.sa/en/aboutus/Pages/default.aspx>



Having said that, the next section will concisely introduce EPMS.

Background Information

Briefly, EPMS is understood as a 'continuous process of identifying, measuring and developing the employee performance of individuals and teams and aligning employee performance with the strategic goals of the organisation' (Aguinis and Pierce 2008, p. 139). This definition suggests a link between employee performance management and human resources management (HRM); and believed to have the capability to affect organisational employee performance (den Hartog, Boselie and Paauwe 2004).

Research on higher education (Birbaum, 2000; Gumpert and Sporn, 1999) and management (Godard, 1999; Leseure et al., 2004) also suggest that the aims and processes of management in higher education could be different from the ones in private-sectors. In addition, most management studies especially in the private sector have utilised EPMS and subsequently relate it to resource-based view (Barney & Wright, 1998). Successively, it is suggested that resource-based view (RBV) could of potential value to help understand the phenomenon and possibility of adopting EPMS, policies and practices for enhancing organisations' staff performance management systems. With this in view, the authors have included RBV in the equation whereby, change agents in the capacity of moderating variable in the whole equation pertaining to employees' performance discussion.

Scope and framework of this paper

Till this stage, we have highlighted factors related to employees' performance and the introduction to EPMS as a tool to mitigate the development of employees' performance. Therein, the Saudi government has introduced another factor in this framework, known as pursuit and quest of knowledge sharing activities among faculty members (Abokhodiar, 2013). Though the efforts are underway since 2005 yet still, the progress is very minimal due to issues related to preservation of costs, modification of objectives and goals, sharing of strategies, and information errors. Having said that; it is believed that the realisation of this effort is subjected to a number of factors, including but not limited to, the university-based the alignment features of EPMS, vertical alignment, communication related to these systems, and control tightness in the academic units (Goll, Johnson, Rasheed, 2007).

Added to this piecemeal, it is also noteworthy to understand that over the last decade or so, the climate of higher education has been referred as experiencing 'turbulent situations' (Middlehurst 2002). Higher education institutions

herein have been confronted with issues of expansion and decentralisation globally (Smeenk, Teelken, Eisinga and Doorewaard 2009). In addition, these issues have been facing growing demands of accountability, efficiency and effectiveness (Chan 2001; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). The changing environment has pressured higher education institutions to seek ways to manage their employees effectively in order to meet these new prospects.

At the same time, managerial concepts and applications have sneaked into the management of universities (Deem 1998; Ferlie, Musselin and Andresani 2008). As a response, many higher education institutions have attempted (either voluntary or under pressure) to adopt to new management systems originally designed to meet the needs of government businesses and/or private sector organisations (Brennan and Shah 2000; Middlehurst 2004; Ferlie et al. 2008; Smeenk et.al., 2009; Decramer, Smolders, Vanderstraeten and Christiaens 2012). Though, having said that; the employee performance management must not be overlooked as it addresses the continuous process of identifying, measuring and developing employee performance both individually as well as in teams with the strategic goals of the organisation (Aguinis and Pierce 2008, p. 139); and bear in mind universities have their public role to play in pursuit of education for the wellbeing of citizens.

Importantly, scholarly work has showcased link between human resource management (HRM) and employee performance management. Indeed when, HRM policies and systems link to employee performance management systems, it typically able to addresses the issues related to the reduction in employee absence, higher employee satisfaction, greater willingness to stay with the organisation; and higher effort. These HRM based outcomes have been emphasised in several HRM – employee performance models over the past two decades (Paauwe 2009). Extrapolating further on Paauwe and Richardson (1997) and Conner and Ulrich, (1996) assessment; satisfaction of employees and change agents could strengthen the relationships between HRM practices and the quality of job employee performance. Predominantly, this nexus indicates towards a gap in the managerial field concerning the academic staff members' performance and development in the Saudi higher education institutions.

Additionally, change agents are discussed to play a moderating role to facilitate organisational change in general (Conner & Ulrich, 1996). Prominent HR practitioners believe that change agents have critical influence on the success of enhancing staff performance, albeit through contributing in managing the change process in



their respective organisations (Csoka, 1995). In that sense, a key for this strategic practice is the anticipation of HR department and its knowledge in managing the desired change diligently (Ehrlich, 1997).

Keeping this in view, it is reasonable to highlight that at first, HRM outcome 'satisfaction' can explain most of the variance in an academic unit's (research group or department) employees' performance (Stolte-Heiskanen 1979). Second, there is general consensus among researchers and practitioners that the assessment of employee performance management reactions is important for the strategic wellbeing (Kuvaas 2006). In parallel, it is also argued that the knowledge regarding the perceptions of employee performance management can considerably enhance the understanding and effectiveness of employee performance management (Wright & Boswell 2002; Liao, Toya, Lepak & Hong 2009). Notably, studies focusing on managerial reports and the use of HRM and employee performance management have mainly ignored taking individual employees' actual experiences with these systems into consideration (Lepak, Liao, Chung & Harden 2006). Accordingly, Paauwe (2009) argues that employee perceptions have to be considered when examining the relationship between HRM and various kinds of both individual and organisational level outcomes. Third, strategic HRM research has predominantly taken a macro-level approach and focused on the establishment or firm-level outcomes. Extrapolating on these arguments, the authors posit to address the following:

- EPMS is associated with academic personal performance; and
- Change agents' ability to alter the relationship between EPMS and academic personnel performance.

Discussion

To date, there is a lack of concrete knowledge and empirical understanding on the way multiple (or systems of) HRM practices like management system, vertical alignment, communication, tight control can impact and influence an academic professional (Decramer, Smolders, & Vanderstraeten, 2013). The traditional research focus of past studies has remained limited to the assessment of employee performance appraisal only which is just one of the elements in a system (Murphy & Cleveland 1995). This paper is therefore; intended to contribute to the literature by widening the concept and uses the EPMS as dependent variable. Moreover, the current paper has attempted to address the research gap through positing the mediating role of change agents, as a strategic mean of HRM.

Furthermore, agenda and performance of higher education institutes have included graduation rates and classes of degree, publications by staff and citations, and the faculty-to-student ratio (Ball & Wilkinson, 1994). The authors have asserted these elements to be of acute importance to improve teaching and research in the universities. For long, academic personnel-based criteria has obtained a central value in the measurement of academic performance (see, Cave et al., 1988, Asif & Raouf 2013). Though, the literature supports a positive link between EPMS and employee performance (Ichniowski, Kochan, Levine, Olson & Strauss 1996). There are also causal models prevailing that suggests that the practices of employee performance management practices can improve the development of workforce skills which in turn manifest in the behaviour that is functional for any organisation (Wright, Dunford & Snell 2001), and ultimately leads towards higher outputs in terms of quantity and quality (Boxall, Purcell & Wright 2007). Regardless, most literatures suggest that practices of EPMS and the organisational system are positively related with organisational performance and employee well-being (Van de Voorde, Paauwe & Van Veldhoven 2011, Veld, Boselie & Paauwe 2010).

Hypothetically, effective EPMS should ideally result in decreasing employee turnover, un-notified absence, and boost willingness to stay in the organisation with satisfaction and work dedication. Building on previous discussion, EPMS is devoted to the tactics, policies and strategies of effectively managing personnel (Duberley & Walley, 1995) and achieving higher performance (Horgan & Mühlau, 2006). Importantly, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no conceptual or empirical attention has geared to probe the effect of EPMS dimensions on academic personnel performance so far. This observation is inclusive of educational research both, nationally as well as internationally.

EPMS in a broader term includes a variety of practices that an organisation utilises in seeking to develop employees' competencies, and enhance their performance (Fletcher, 2001). With that being well established, it is therefore central to acknowledge that the use EPMS is expected to result in higher outcomes, especially in terms of employees' commitment, motivation, and performance (see, Boselie, Dietz & Boon, 2005).

It is noteworthy to state that there is general consensus among researchers and practitioners that the assessment using the EPMS has strengthen its ties with the overall performance (Kuvaas 2006). It is also argued that the knowledge regarding the perceptions of employees' performance can help improve the understanding of different employees performance management



(Wright and Boswell 2002; Liao, Toya, Lepak and Hong 2009).

Change agents in the same token are expected to act as leaders who can cut across an organisation and by passing the traditional hierarchy. Often these men and women are free from day-to-day tasks in order to focus solely on leading and driving change. Directly or indirectly, they implement new processes; train employees on new procedures, and act as role models to demonstrate contemporary ways to work (Arrata, Despierre, & Kumra, 2007). Accordingly, it is believed that a carefully constructed change agent programme is essential to any hence can result into successful operational transformation. Organisations seeking to transform their operations frequently overlook the importance of change agents. Considering that the importance of

academic personnel performance and its association with the adopted system, namely, EPMS; a change in the policy of these institution is eminent. Moreover, this change desperately demands the services of change agents to ensure that an effective change and implementation of EPMS are well integrated.

Henceforth, the current paper is confined to highlighting the concepts of EPMS, change agents, and academic staff performance. The study is limited in its scope to the conceptualisation of the direct and moderated relationship between EPMS and academic personnel performance. Thus, it is essential for future researchers to examine the wider premises of each entity introspectively so that better generalizable ideas could be forwarded to enhance employees' performance effectively.

References

- Aguinis, H., and Pierce, C. (2008), 'Enhancing the Relevance of Organizational Behavior by Embracing Performance Management Research,' *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29, 139–145.
- Bach, S. (2000), 'From Performance Appraisal to Performance Management,' in *Personnel Management: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, eds. S. Bach and K. Sisson, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 241–286.
- Bach, S. (2005), *Managing Human Resources: Personnel Management in Transition* (3rd ed.), Oxford: Blackwell.
- Boon, C., Paauwe, J., Boselie, P., and den Hartog, D. (2009), 'Institutional Pressures and HRM: Developing Institutional Fit,' *Personnel Review*, 38, 492–508.
- Boselie, P., Paauwe, J., and Jansen, P. (2001), 'Human Resource Management and Performance: Lessons from the Netherlands,' *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 12, 1107–1125.
- Boswell, W. (2006), 'Aligning Employees with the Organization's Strategic Objectives: Out of 'Line of Sight', Out of Mind,' *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17, 1489–1511.
- Boswell, W., and Boudreau, J. (2001), 'How Leading Companies Create, Measure and Achieve Strategic Results Through 'Line of Sight', ' *Management Decision*, 39, 851–860.
- Boxall, P., and Purcell, J. (2011), *Strategy and Human Resource Management*, Houndmills: Palgrave.
- Boxall, P., Purcell, J., and Wright, P. (2007), *The Oxford Handbook of Human Resource Management*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brennan, J., and Shah, T. (2000), 'Quality Assessment and Institutional Change: Experiences from 14 Countries,' *Higher Education*, 40, 331–349.
- Cawley, B.D., Keeping, L.M., and Levy, P.E. (1998), 'Participation in the Performance Appraisal Process and Employee Reactions: A Meta-Analytic Review of Field Investigations,' *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 83, 615–633.
- Chan, K. (2001), 'The Difficulties and Dilemma of Constructing a Model for Teacher Evaluation in Higher Education,' *Higher Education Management*, 13, 1, 93–111.
- Decramer, A., Smolders, C., Vanderstraeten, A., and Christiaens, J. (2012), 'The Impact of Institutional Pressures on Employee Performance Management Systems in Higher Education in the Low Countries,' *British Journal of Management*, 2, S88–S103.
- Decramer, Adelen, Carine Smolders, and Alex Vanderstraeten. "Employee performance management culture and system features in higher education: relationship with employee performance management satisfaction." *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 24, no. 2 (2013): 352–371.
- Deem, R. (1998), 'New Managerialism' and Higher Education: The Management of Performances and Cultures in Universities in the United Kingdom,' *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 8, 47–70.
- Delery, J. (1998), 'Issues of Fit in Strategic Human Resource Management: Implications for Research,' *Human Resource Management Review*, 8, 289–309.



- Delery, J., and Doty, D. (1996), 'Modes of Theorizing in Strategic Human Resource Management: Tests of Universalistic, Contingency, and Configurational Performance Predictions,' *The Academy of Management Journal*, 39, 802–835.
- Den Hartog, D.N., Boselie, P., and Paauwe, J. (2004), 'Performance Management: A Model and Research Agenda,' *Applied Psychology: an International Review*, 53, 556–569.
- DeNisi, A. (2000), 'Performance Appraisal and Performance Management: A Multilevel Analysis,' in *Multilevel Theory, Research and Methods in Organizations*, eds. K. Klein and S. Kozkowski, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, pp. 121–156.
- DeNisi, A., and Pritchard, R. (2006), 'Performance Appraisal, Performance Management and Improving Individual Performance: A Motivational Framework,' *Management and Organization Review*, 2, 253–277.
- Ferlie, E., Musselin, C., and Andresani, G. (2008), 'The Steering of Higher Education Systems: A Public Management Perspective,' *Higher Education*, 56, 325–348.
- Fletcher, C. (2001), 'Performance Appraisal and Management: The Developing Research Agenda,' *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 74, 473–487.
- Fletcher, C., and Williams, R. (1996), 'Performance Management, Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment,' *British Journal of Management*, 7, 169–179.
- Gould-Williams, J.S. (2004), 'The Effects of 'High Commitment' HRM Practices on Employee Attitude: The Views of Public Sector Workers,' *Public Administration*, 82, 63–81.
- Ichniowski, C., Kochan, T., Levine, D., Olson, C., and Strauss, G. (1996), 'What Works at Work: Overview and Assessment,' *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, 35, 299–333.
- Ichniowski, C., and Shaw, K. (1999), 'The Effects of Human Resource Management Systems on Economic Performance: An International Comparison of US and Japanese Plants,' *Management Science*, 45, 704–721.
- Kuvaas, B. (2006), 'Performance Appraisal Satisfaction and Employee Outcomes: Mediating and Moderating Roles of Work Motivation,' *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17, 504–522.
- Kuvaas, B. (2008), 'An Exploration of How the Employee–Organization Relationship Affects the Linkage Between Perception of Developmental Human Resource Practices and Employee Outcomes,' *Journal of Management Studies*, 45, 1–25.
- Latham, G.P., Almost, J., Mann, S., and Moore, C. (2005), 'New Developments in Performance Management,' *Organizational Dynamics*, 34, 77–87.
- Lepak, D., Liao, H., Chung, Y., and Harden, E. (2006), 'A Conceptual Review of Human Resource Management Systems in Strategic Human Resource Management Research,' in *Research in Personnel and Human Resource Management*, ed. J. Martocchio, Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, pp. 217–271.
- Lepak, D.P., and Snell, S.A. (2002), 'Examining the Human Resource Architecture: The Relationships Among Human Capital, Employment, and Human Resource Configurations,' *Journal of Management*, 28, 517–543.
- Levy, P.E., Cawley, B.D., and Foti, R.J. (1998), 'Reactions to Appraisal Discrepancies: Performance Ratings and Attributions,' *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 12, 437–455.
- Liao, H., Toya, K., Lepak, D., and Hong, Y. (2009), 'Do They See Eye to Eye? Management and Employee Perspectives of High-Performance Work Systems and Influence Processes on Service Quality,' *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94, 371–391.
- Middlehurst, R. (2002), 'The International Context for UK Higher Education,' in *The Effective Academic: A Handbook for Enhanced Academic Practice*, eds. S. Ketteridge, S. Marshall and H. Fry, London: Kogan Page, pp. 13–31.
- Middlehurst, R. (2004), 'Changing Internal Governance: A Discussion of Leadership Roles and Management Structures in UK Universities,' *Higher Education Quarterly*, 58, 258–279.
- Murphy, K., and Cleveland, J. (1995), *Understanding Performance Appraisal: Social, Organizational, and Goal-Based Perspectives*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Paauwe, J. (2009), 'HRM and Performance: Achievements, Methodological Issues and Prospects,' *Journal of Management Studies*, 46, 129–142.
- Paauwe, J., and Richardson, R. (1997), 'Introduction Special Issue on HRM and Performance,' *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 8, 257–262.
- Pollitt, C., and Bouckaert, G. (2004), *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Purcell, J., and Hutchinson, S. (2007), 'Front-Line Managers as Agents in the HRM-Performance Causal Chain: Theory, Analysis and Evidence,' *Human Resource Management Journal*, 17, 3–20.



- Smeenk, S., Teelken, C., Eisinga, R., and Doorewaard, H. (2009), 'Managerialism, Organizational Commitment, and Quality of Job Performances Among European University Employees,' *Research in Higher Education*, 50, 589–607.
- Stolte-Heiskanen, V. (1979), 'Externally Determined Resources and the Effectiveness of Research Units,' in *Scientific Productivity*, ed. F. Andrews, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 121–153.
- Van de Voorde, K., Paauwe, J., and Van Veldhoven, M. (2011), 'Employee Wellbeing and the HRM–Organizational Performance Relationship: A Review of Quantitative Studies,' *International Journal of Management Reviews*, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00322.x/abstract>
- Veld, M., Boselie, P., and Paauwe, J. (2010), 'HRM and Strategic Climates in Hospitals: Does the Message Come Across at the Ward Level?' *Human Resource Management Journal*, 20, 339–356.
- Williams, R. (2002), *Performance Management*, London: International Thomson Business Press.
- Wright, P., and Boswell, W. (2002), 'Desegregating HRM: A Review and Synthesis of Micro- and Macro-Human Resource Management Research,' *Journal of Management*, 28, 247–276.
- Wright, P., Dunford, B., and Snell, S. (2001), 'Human Resources and the Resource Based View of the Firm,' *Journal of Management*, 27, 701–721.
- Wright, P.M., and Nishii, L.H. (2004), 'Strategic HRM and Organizational Behaviour: Integrating Multiple Levels of Analysis,' in *HRM: What's Next?* Rotterdam: Erasmus University.